

LET'S TAKE OUR DAUGHTERS AND SONS TO WORK

From the time they are young, boys and girls dream about being doctors, nurses, teachers, firefighters, police officers and even rock stars when they grow up. Very rarely, however, do you hear a child say they want to be a Politician, though they might express a desire to be President. And yet, from the age of eight, that was a dream of mine because I had the wonderful experience of sitting on the floor of the Atlanta House of Representatives during session when my Brownie Troop visited the State Capitol.

I went home enthralled with it all and promptly declared that I was going to do that when I grew up. The amazing thing to me today is that no one told me I couldn't, because I realize now how few women held elected positions at that time. Instead people encouraged me, no one more so than my father. Later that same year, the two of us shared many an hour watching the Republican Convention on our brand new TV, as he explained the process to me and I've been hooked ever since. Later growing up in Pennsylvania, he "volunteered" me to work on a campaign for our local congressman, and I got my first taste of grassroots campaigning, licking stamps and all. Over the years I volunteered in many more campaigns. It was just a matter of time before I made the move to seek office myself - and it all began with that trip to the state capitol.

That's why I have been delighted to sponsor the Take Your Daughters to Work Day in Lansing for the past few years and have a member of my staff participate in the planning and organizing of the activities for the day. It is a day for young people (not just girls) to experience what goes on within the walls of state government - tour the capitol, participate in a caucus to discuss legislation, as well as a mock session on the House floor, complete with debate and voting. There are opportunities to slip in and out of committee meetings, watch the senate in session and learn about the many jobs involved - not just the politicians, but staff members, lobbyists, even the sergeants who are present to ensure order during sessions.

While we've had boys participate in the events in the past, this year the program has officially been launched as Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day, and thousands of boys and girls throughout the country will have an opportunity to visit a workplace and begin to make a connection between what they learn in school and their future careers. Many will return to school the next day and share their experiences with others and talk about opportunities that perhaps they did not know existed before their day in the workplace.

That's what it's all about - opportunity. I had the opportunity and a dream was formed. Would I be where I am today without that trip to the state capitol? Who knows, but I do know for sure that it set in place my future career path.

A poll conducted for the 10th anniversary of the Take Our Daughters to Work Day found that the program increased girls' interest in education, influenced their decision about higher education, and broadened their understanding of career possibilities. I believe that those young men and women who participate in Take Our

Daughters and Sons to Work Day this April 24th will experience more than just a day away from school. It is a day for adults to show boys and girls opportunities they never knew existed and to encourage them to become all that they can.

By Senator Bev Hammerstrom

17<sup>th</sup> District